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Iowa Hopes To Snare Minnesota Construction Workers



ROSEVILLE, Minn. (WCCO) — Minnesota and Iowa have gone head-to-head on the gridiron for decades. But with both states' economies in turmoil and jobs on the line, the friendly rivalry between the states is about to spill over to dozens of highway construction sites.

Reporting
Bill Hudson

It's now a game of economic recovery, where the only competition is to score a pool of skilled workers.

"Yep... This is roads, heavy highway, bridge and underground utility construction," said Industry People Group's Bryan May.

He's vice president of the online career services provider, IPG, which designed a Web page for Iowa's Department of Transportation and its Associated General Contractors. The site has been posting jobs and appealing for skilled construction workers since Jan. 15.

Iowa's share of the federal stimulus money will be \$358 million. That money is in addition to Iowa's \$550 million in state money for highway construction.



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With so much money to be spent on highway-related construction, the state and its contractors want to be ready to hire qualified workers when those jobs are finally awarded.

May said the reasons for the jobs Web site are two-fold.

"It's for those contractors that are doing work in Minnesota state work. And two, for those qualified, skilled people that aren't able to find jobs in their local area, yet they still need to feed their family," he said.

Minnesota is also eyeing up a huge pile of cash to spend on both federal and state funded highway projects. The first round of stimulus money will fund about 60 projects scattered around greater Minnesota. With a combined \$700 million worth of projects at home, the phone won't stop ringing at the offices of local 49, the International Union of Operating Engineers.

The union's 13,000 members are responsible for operating all the heavy construction equipment -- pieces of machinery like tower cranes, caterpillars and earthmovers. With a full slate of highway and bridge projects scheduled for Minnesota, members will have no reason to leave the state in search of work.

Glen Johnson is the union's business manager, who said, "as far as members of the Local 49, you will see zero (members) traveling to work for a contractor down there."

In fact, Johnson says every operating engineer who wants to work this summer, will be able to find a job somewhere in the state. Still, he's not surprised the largely non-union contractors in Iowa are looking to their northern neighbor to help fill their jobs.

According to Johnson, "if you want good workers where do you go? You go to a state produces good workers."

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Regardless of which side of the border you are on the strategy behind the construction stimulus package appears to taking hold. Unemployed construction workers will soon be back on the job and pumping money back into the struggling economy.

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